

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) An apparatus for piercing container caps, comprising:
  - a) a piercing blade having a longitudinal axis and a zigzagged cross-section that is perpendicular to said axis;
  - b) an alignment arm for moving said blade in a linear motion along said longitudinal axis to pierce a cap on a container, comprising a carriage assembly for moving said alignment arm, wherein movement of said blade is limited to linear motion along said longitudinal axis, wherein said zig-zagged cross-section produces a Z-shaped cut on said cap; and means for driving said carriage assembly.
2. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein said piercing blade has at least one sharpened tip for piercing a cap of a container and spreading the load applied on the blade.
3. (Canceled)
4. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 1, further comprising an alignment block assembly for restraining said container when said piercing blade is being withdrawn after piercing a cap.

5. (Currently amended) ~~The~~ An apparatus ~~as defined in claim 4, further for~~  
piercing container caps comprising:

- a) a piercing blade having a longitudinal axis and a zigzagged cross section that is perpendicular to said axis;
- b) an alignment arm for moving said blade in a linear motion along said longitudinal axis to pierce a cap on a container, comprising a carriage assembly for moving said alignment arm, wherein movement of said blade is limited to linear motion along said longitudinal axis;
- c) means for driving said carriage assembly;
- d) an alignment block assembly for restraining said container when said piercing blade is being withdrawn after piercing a cap; and
- e) a latch assembly for latching said alignment block assembly when said piercing blade is being withdrawn from a pierced cap to prevent said container from being moved by friction with said withdrawn blade.

6. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 5, wherein said latch assembly further comprising a trigger movable between a latching position when said piercing blade is being withdrawn from a pierced cap and an unlatched position after said piercing blade has been withdrawn from said pierced cap.

7. (Previously presented) The apparatus as defined in claim 6, wherein said latch assembly further comprising an actuator engaged with said trigger, wherein the actuator has locking means, such that when said trigger moves to said latching position, said actuator causes its locking means to matingly lock with a fixed complimentary locking means to latch said alignment assembly, and when said trigger moves to said unlatched position, said actuator causes its locking means to

unlock from said fixed complimentary locking means to unlatch said alignment assembly.

8. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 7, wherein said locking means of said actuator and said fixed complimentary locking means are gear rack teeth.

9. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 7, wherein said locking means of said actuator and said fixed complimentary locking means are saw teeth.

10. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 7, wherein said actuator is spring-biased.

11-20. (Cancelled)

21. (Currently amended) An apparatus for piercing container caps, comprising:

- a) a piercing blade having a longitudinal axis and a zigzagged cross-section that is perpendicular to said axis;
- b) an alignment arm for moving said blade in a linear motion along said longitudinal axis to pierce a cap on a container, wherein movement of said blade is limited to linear motion along said longitudinal axis, wherein said zig-zagged cross-section produces a Z-shaped cut on said cap; and
- c) means for preventing said container from being moved by friction with said blade when said blade is being withdrawn from a pierced cap.

22. (Previously presented) The apparatus as defined in claim 21, wherein said piercing blade has at least one sharpened tip for piercing a cap of a container and spreading the load applied on the blade.

23. (Previously presented) The apparatus as defined in claim 21 further comprising:

- a) a carriage assembly for moving said alignment arm; and
- b) means for driving said carriage assembly.

24. (Previously presented) The apparatus as defined in claim 21, wherein said preventing means comprises an alignment block assembly for restraining said container when said piercing blade is being withdrawn after piercing a cap.

25. (Currently amended) ~~The~~ An apparatus ~~as defined in claim 21~~ for piercing container caps, comprising:

- a) a piercing blade having a longitudinal axis and a zigzagged cross-section that is perpendicular to said axis;
- b) an alignment arm for moving said blade in a linear motion along said longitudinal axis to pierce a cap on a container, wherein movement of said blade is limited to linear motion along said longitudinal axis; and
- c) means for preventing said container from being moved by friction with said blade when said blade is being withdrawn from a pierced cap, wherein said preventing means further comprises a latch assembly for latching said alignment block assembly when said piercing blade is being withdrawn from a pierced cap to prevent said container being lifted up by friction with said withdrawn blade.

26. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 25, wherein said latch assembly further comprises a trigger movable between a latching position when said piercing blade is being withdrawn from a pierced cap and an unlatched position after said piercing blade has been withdrawn from said pierced cap.

27. (Previously presented) The apparatus as defined in claim 26, wherein said latch assembly further comprises an actuator engaged with said trigger, wherein the actuator has locking means, such that when said trigger moves to said latching position, said actuator causes its locking means to matingly lock with a fixed complimentary locking means to latch said alignment assembly, and when said trigger moves to said unlatched position, said actuator causes its locking means to unlock from said fixed complimentary locking means to unlatch said alignment assembly.

28. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 27, wherein said locking means of said actuator and said fixed complimentary locking means are gear rack teeth.

29. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 27, wherein said locking means of said actuator and said fixed complimentary locking means are saw teeth.

30. (Original) The apparatus as defined in claim 27, wherein said actuator is spring-biased.

31. (Canceled)